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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1105  
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3133  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2519  
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO BRUSSELS BE  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BISHKEK 001135

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/06/2018  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KIRF](#) [KDEM](#) [KG](#)  
SUBJECT: KYRGYZ PARLIAMENT PASSES LAW ON RELIGION,  
REJECTING PROPOSED REVISIONS

REF: A. BISHKEK 143  
[1](#)B. BISHKEK 946  
[1](#)C. STATE 118112

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Classified By: Ambassador Tatiana C. Gfoeller for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: After years of debate and numerous revisions, the Kyrgyz Parliament passed a controversial law on religion on November 6. The law has been forwarded to the president for signature. Minority Christian leaders continued to raise concerns about the restrictions and lamented that the law's implementation would severely hamper freedom of religion. During several earlier roundtables, government officials and parliamentary advocates had defended the law, arguing the need to improve upon religion laws to prevent religious conflict and curb extremism. In a final twist on the day of the vote, the Ak Jol faction rejected proposed changes to the law that would have loosened registration restrictions previously pledged by the parliamentary committee chairman. End summary.

EXPRESSIONS OF DESPAIR FROM THE CHRISTIANS  
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[1](#)2. (C) Baptist Pastor and head of the Union of Churches of Evangelical Christians Alexander Shumilin told Poloff that his attempts to influence the government in favor of more liberal restrictions had failed. The draft law on Freedom of Religion and Religious Organizations (ref B) prohibits proselytizing, unregistered religious activity, and private religious education. Shumilin, a staunch opponent to the law, said that the government had invited him to participate in the working group established to draft the law on religion. However, he said that the invitation merely allowed the government to argue that it supported an open dialogue on the issue and included the minority Christians in the drafting process. Shumilin said that during a recent working group meeting, he tried to convince Osmonaliyev to loosen

restrictions proposed in the draft law, but his pleas were "met with the same rhetoric heard in previous roundtables."

#### YET ANOTHER ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

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¶3. (C) On October 31, at the fifth roundtable discussion on the draft religion law, Kyrgyz government officials said that a proposed Law on Religious Freedom was necessary to prevent religious conflict and combat the spread of extremism but conceded to loosen some of the key restrictions. Representatives from the Kyrgyz Parliament, State Agency for Religious Affairs (SARA), Muftiate, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and civil society attended and expressed views, both positive and negative, about the draft law and government controls. Government officials presented a united front in support of the draft law. Shailobek Urkunbaev, the SARA representative, stated that the new law would more clearly define the regulations for registering religious organizations, establish controls over religious educational institutions, and set parameters for the operation of missionary centers and missionaries' activities.

#### MP KURMANOV PROMISES FEWER RESTRICTIONS

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¶4. (C) During the roundtable, the lead advocate for the draft law, Parliamentarian Zainidin Kurmanov, argued that the current law was outdated and failed to govern properly religious entities but, in an effort to soothe the critics, revealed a number of changes to the text based on the

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recommendations of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) Advisory Council on Freedom of Religion and Belief. He noted that relaxed requirements for registration from 200 members to 50 were among the amendments to the draft law. Kurmanov said that the Bible, Torah, and Koran imported into the country would be exempt from examination by government censors. He also claimed that some provisions considered by the Advisory Council to be ambiguous would be clarified, thus reducing the possibility of broad interpretation on the part of the authorities. (Note: Kurmanov's office and other contacts in parliament and the SARA have not responded to requests for copies of the final draft by Post, the OSCE, religious organizations, and civil society groups. End note.)

#### PARLIAMENT PASSED LAW WITHOUT LOOSENING RESTRICTIONS

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¶5. (C) On November 6, Parliament passed the law on religion without opposition and forwarded the legislation for President Bakiyev's signature. During the October 9 plenary session, Parliament had approved the first reading of the draft law and returned it to the drafters with limited suggested changes to the text. On October 31, MPs held a second reading but lacked a quorum to pass the law. Finally, on November 6, 81 out of 82 MPs present voted in favor of the draft law (the remaining MP abstained) and recommended it for signing by President Bakiyev. According to a press report, the ruling Ak Jol party held a meeting on November 5 to discuss the draft law and decided to retain the original 200-member requirement for registration. Prior to the vote, Ak Jol members confirmed that the draft contained this provision. (Note: Until Parliament releases a copy of the final draft, Post is unable to confirm this or other amendments to the law. End note.)

#### COMMENT

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¶6. (C) Throughout this process, Post has expressed concerns to a wide range of Kyrgyz officials about the restrictions

contained in the law. We also passed to the Kyrgyz government A/S Kramer's letter to FM Karabayev urging further work with the OSCE on the law's provisions. If signed by Bakiyev, this religion law will present obstacles for smaller, minority religious groups and organizations. Five days before the October 31 roundtable, Pastor Shumilin predicted that the government had set severely restrictive provisions in the original draft law only to back down from them slightly and appear to be giving in to the pressure of international organizations. On October 31, Shumilin concluded that the government would still have ample tools to persecute the Christian groups. On November 6, Pastor Shumilin conceded that the Kyrgyz government was unaffected by the pressure of international organizations and foreign governments on this issue. One question left unanswered is whether existing organizations would have to re-register under the new regulations. The Embassy will continue to track this issue closely, including the beginning stages of the law's implementation.

GFOELLER